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Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly

Security Council
Seventy-second year

Identical letters dated 5 October 2017 from the Permanent Representative of Estonia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit on behalf of 25 Member States[1] of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group a note on the selection process of the ninth Secretary-General of the United Nations in 2015 and 2016 (see annex). The cross-regional Group played a leading role in the negotiations on the revitalization of the General Assembly on increased transparency, inclusiveness and accountability of the process for selecting the ninth Secretary-General, and we hope that the note will serve as a reference for future selection processes.

I should be grateful if you would circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the seventy-second session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 121, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Sven **Jürgenson**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

[1] Austria, Chile, Costa Rica, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Gabon, Ghana, Hungary, Ireland, Jordan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Maldives, New Zealand, Norway, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Portugal, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland and Uruguay.

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Please recycle

Annex to the identical letters dated 5 October 2017 from the Permanent Representative of Estonia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council

Lessons learned on the selection and appointment of the ninth Secretary-General of the United Nations in 2015 and 2016

In 2014, the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group (ACT Group)[1] started its work to increase the transparency, inclusiveness and accountability of the process for selecting the next Secretary-General. The selection process, which had been the same for the previous 70 years, was viewed by many as outdated and not fit for purpose. Member States, parliamentarians and civil society organizations from across the globe argued that a process conducted in secret by the Security Council was no longer appropriate and would not guarantee the selection of the best possible candidate.

The ACT Group believes that the General Assembly has the right, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, resolutions 69/321 and 70/305 and other relevant decisions, to play a more active role in the selection process. In 2015 and 2016, the Group worked to help empower the Assembly and its President to engage directly with candidates; it also set expectations on the selection criteria and encouraged the Security Council towards a more inclusive and transparent approach.

The ACT Group played a leading role in the negotiations on the revitalization of the General Assembly, and the main objectives outlined in its position papers from March 2015 and February 2016,[2] from declared candidatures to open hearings, became integral parts of Assembly resolutions 69/321 and 70/305.

The members of the ACT Group are convinced that the standards achieved and the principles set out in the resolutions on the revitalization of the General Assembly should be applied and strengthened in all future selection processes. To that end, the Group suggests the proposals set out below.

General Assembly and the President of the General Assembly

- The General Assembly, through its Member States and its President, must continue to play a key role in all future selection processes. The ACT Group recalls that it is the Assembly that is, upon the recommendation of the Security Council, responsible for appointing the Secretary-General. It is essential that the Secretary-General enjoy the widest possible support among the membership.
- For the ACT Group, it is crucial that the role of the General Assembly in the selection process be consolidated. The role of the President of the General Assembly in the process is also critical; the Group encourages the proactive engagement by the President of the General Assembly across the entire selection cycle.
- In the view of the ACT Group, negotiations on outstanding issues with regard to the role of the General Assembly must be carried through without delay in

[1] The Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group is a cross-regional group of 25 States that includes: Austria, Chile, Costa Rica, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Gabon, Ghana, Hungary, Ireland, Jordan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Maldives, New Zealand, Norway, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Portugal, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland and Uruguay.

[2] See http://www.un.estemb.org/news/aid-1348 and http://www.un.estemb.org/news/aid-1349.

the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, notwithstanding the actual selection cycle.

Selection timeline and the nomination of candidates

- Providing a structured time frame for the selection process greatly enhanced the selection process in 2015 and 2016. The ACT Group believes that a deadline for the presentation of candidatures, as well as a timeline for the overall process, such as that set out below, should be followed for future processes, while bearing in mind that ultimately the best possible candidate should be appointed.
- The ACT Group proposes an indicative timeline for appointment of future Secretaries-General, as follows:
    - October of the year preceding appointment: joint letter from the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council to all United Nations Member States encouraging the nomination of qualified candidates;
    - 1 April of the appointment year: deadline for the submission of candidatures;
    - End of June of the appointment year: deadline for the completion of General Assembly hearings with all candidates;
    - 1 October: deadline for the Security Council recommendation and the resolution from the General Assembly regarding the appointment of the Secretary-General.
- The ACT Group encourages the early presentation of qualified candidates, as late nominations may not allow sufficient time for full evaluation.
- The ACT Group welcomes the value added by various stakeholders, including civil society, in searching for suitable candidates on their own initiative as an input for consideration by Member States.
- The ACT Group calls on all candidates to participate fully in the overall selection process.

Selection process and informal meetings with the candidates

- The General Assembly should play an active role in the selection process, in accordance with the Charter, resolutions 69/321 and 70/305 and other relevant decisions.
- For the ACT Group, the informal dialogues and meetings with the candidates are a key part of the selection process. It expects all candidates to take part in the meetings and to circulate a document outlining their policy priorities in advance. The fact that the President of the General Assembly insisted during the latest selection on following the same procedure for all of the candidates prevented any attempts at selecting a candidate from outside the list.
- The ACT Group sees possibilities to further improve the format of the informal dialogues by making them more interactive, for example by increasing the time available to candidates to provide responses and by having the President of the General Assembly play an active role as moderator, including by seeking to avoid the duplication of questions.
- The ACT Group calls for ensuring that civil society can continue to actively participate in the informal dialogues and meetings with the candidates, and

also encourages candidates themselves to interact with civil society organizations. Furthermore, the Group encourages civil society to continue working towards improving the selection process of the Secretary-General and continue its efforts towards ensuring that the best possible candidate will be appointed, for example by looking into the practice of existing panels of highly regarded individuals who review candidates and their qualifications for similar senior positions, in order to assist Member States in their assessments.

- The ACT Group encourages the consideration of possible ways to assess the level of General Assembly support for the candidates throughout the process.

Interaction between the Security Council and the General Assembly

- The ACT Group notes the collaboration between the General Assembly and the Security Council in launching the process and circulating information on the nominated candidates. The Group also welcomes the holding of monthly meetings between the Presidents of the General Assembly and the Security Council and values the summaries shared with all Member States.

- Nevertheless, the ACT Group believes that the interaction between the Security Council and the General Assembly needs to be improved to live up to the expectations of the membership and the new standard of openness and transparency.

- In that regard, the ACT Group encourages the Security Council to review its working methods, building on the discussions held among Council members during the latest selection process. For example, the Group believes that collective discussions within the Council on the merit, skills or experience of individual candidates would enhance Council decision-making.

- The ACT Group recalls the collective responsibility of the Security Council to reach consensus on a recommendation to the General Assembly for the appointment of the Secretary-General. In that regard, the Group believes the use of colour-coded ballots during straw polling should be discouraged and the equal rights and role of all Council members in the process should be upheld.

- The ACT Group calls for regular public briefings by the Security Council on developments in the nomination process and open communication of straw poll results.

Identification, appointment and reappointment

- In identifying the best candidate for appointment, personal qualification is the most important criterion for appointment, while due regard should be given to fair geographical distribution through rotation and to gender balance.

- The ACT Group recalls the prerogative of the General Assembly to draft the resolution for the appointment of the Secretary-General and proposes that the draft resolution be finalized at the Assembly's earliest convenience to ensure that the process is not linked to any individual candidate.

- The ACT Group welcomes the informal meeting of the General Assembly with the Secretary-General-designate convened by the President of the General Assembly in November 2016, with the aim of assisting him in his preparation for office, and encourages similar meetings in the framework of future processes of appointment of Secretaries-General.

- The ACT Group believes that all of the provisions in the present document regarding the selection and appointment of the Secretary-General should apply

in the event that an incumbent Secretary-General seeks or is proposed for reappointment.

- In line with the provisions of the Charter and the oath taken by the Secretary-General, the ACT Group believes that the Secretary-General should exercise complete independence in the selection of senior officials, with due regard to geographical and gender balance. Recalling General Assembly resolution 70/305, the appointment process of the executive heads and the Senior Management Group of the Organization should be inclusive and transparent and there should not be a monopoly on senior posts by nationals of any State or group of States.

- In that regard, the ACT Group proposes that the principles governing the appointment of executive heads and the Senior Management Group of the organization be formally established.

- The ACT Group believes that the oath of office of the Secretary-General should be updated.

Term in office

- The ACT Group would like to continue the discussion and see an informed decision taken within the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly by all States on the term of office of the Secretary-General, including the proposal to establish a single, non-renewable term for future Secretaries-General.